

Veterans share war stories with Orleans students

By John Loftus

Northeast Times

William J. Myers had to pay for the helmet he wore as a Marine during World War II. The 89-year-old South Philly man still recalls the price with a smile. He was charged \$2.87.

Myers was 19 years old and was wearing that helmet when he was shot during the third week of the Battle of Iwo Jima in early 1945. Japanese soldiers had poured out of a cave and had attacked a line held by U.S. Marines, he told students in a court reporting class at Orleans Technical Institute on Nov. 5. He said he felt a burning in his right ear as an enemy bullet whizzed by before it struck the back of his helmet, sending shards of metal into his right shoulder.

He wasn't severely hurt, the West Philly native said while reminiscing in the Red Lion Road school last week, and he wanted to hang on to that helmet. When he got to Hawaii on his way home, he was told he'd have to pay to keep it. He did, but then described a situation that added a little priceless irony to his story. The government, he said, was dumping all sorts of tanks and artillery at the time, but Uncle Sam still wanted that \$2.87.

Myers, as well as seven others, shared stories about their service experiences from World War II to Afghanistan. The event was part learning experience for 40 students in the school's court reporting program and part tribute to veterans.

The vets' memories were taken down during "Veterans History Project Day" on the same stenographic machines court reporters use. They will later be transcribed and then finally placed in the Library of Congress.

"These are stories you will never read in the history books, but now will be recorded for generations of learning and appreciation," said professional court reporter and Orleans Tech grad Julie Wilson, who took down Myers' story.

"These stories will live forever

now," said Orleans spokesman Justin Windheim.

The Veterans History Project was launched by the Library of Congress in 2000, according to Windheim, to collect veterans' stories. Court reporters from around the country have participated in the program for more than a decade, and the National Court Reporters Foundation has provided the Washington, D.C., library with more than 3,000 transcripts.

"Court reporters are instrumental in documenting the personal accounts of our nation's war veterans, and it's an honor for our industry to be a part of history-making," said Kathy McHugh, president of the Pennsylvania Court Reporters Association. McHugh also recorded vets' stories at Orleans.

Philadelphia Judge Patrick Dugan was instrumental in spreading the word to veterans about the program, McHugh said. Evidently, the judge's efforts had distance. Myers said he heard about Orleans' program at a Catholic church in Wildwood, N.J.

Last week, Myers had recalled many experiences during — and after — World War II.

Myers said he had been drafted when he was 18 years old. After he was wounded, he was evacuated from Iwo Jima and, while on a ship, he had learned of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's death. He said he was part of the force that was expecting to invade Japan. Many casualties were expected in that assault, he said.

"Thank God [President] Harry Truman dropped that [atomic] bomb," Myers said. "That's what saved our lives." Japan surrendered soon after Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed, making an invasion unnecessary.

Back in the States and out of the Marine Corps, Myers told the students, he attended St. Joseph's College on the G.I. Bill. Expenses, tuition and even a sti-



pend were included, he said, so it was an opportunity he couldn't pass up.

"You'd be a fool not to go back to school," he said. ••

Orleans Technical Institute, 2770 Red Lion Road, is operated by JEVS Human Services, and offers court reporting/captioning, human services, carpentry, plumbing and heating and residential and commercial electrical programs.